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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ROME 001187

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SIPDIS

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TAGS PGOV, PREL, IT  
SUBJECT: ITALY: SCANDALS TAKING TOLL ON BERLUSCONI'S PERSONAL AND POLITICAL HEALTH

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Classified By: Ambassador David H. Thorne for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. Though PM Berlusconi's parliamentary majority is strong, and nobody is yet willing to predict his political demise, a growing number of private matters are weighing on Berlusconi.

¶2. (SBU) After a long hot spring and summer of personal and professional scandals, PM Berlusconi, returning from the August recess appeared brusque and weary.

¶3. (C/NF) Two officials XXXXXXXXXX in separate conversations with the Embassy, recently described the Prime Minister in strikingly similar terms.

¶4. (C/NF) XXXXXXXXXX termed Berlusconi overwhelmed with private concerns. He noted that Berlusconi has felt alienated from his family since the death of his mother.

¶5. (C/NF) A number of Embassy contacts have described a political environment dominated by conspiracy theories. In the wake of the two court cases, the political environment has become increasingly paranoid.

¶6. (C/NF) XXXXXXXXXX confided that Berlusconi believes the Italian intelligence services might have deliberately entrapped him in his alleged affair with a young woman.

¶7. (C/NF) In a replay of the foreign press-induced scandals of last spring and summer, a London Times article accusing Italian troops in Afghanistan of war crimes has rekindled interest in the so-called "Afghan Palace Intrigue".

¶8. (C/NF) One of Berlusconi's would-be heirs, Chamber of Deputies President Gianfranco Fini, picked one of his periodic fights with Berlusconi over the issue of gay marriage.

¶9. (C/NF) Media mogul Berlusconi might be gaffe-prone when speaking off the cuff, but he has historically shown himself astute at strategic maneuvering.

COMMENT

¶10. (C/NF) Sex scandals, criminal investigations, family problems and financial concerns appear to be weighing heavily on Berlusconi's personal life. In the wake of the two court cases, the political environment has become increasingly paranoid.